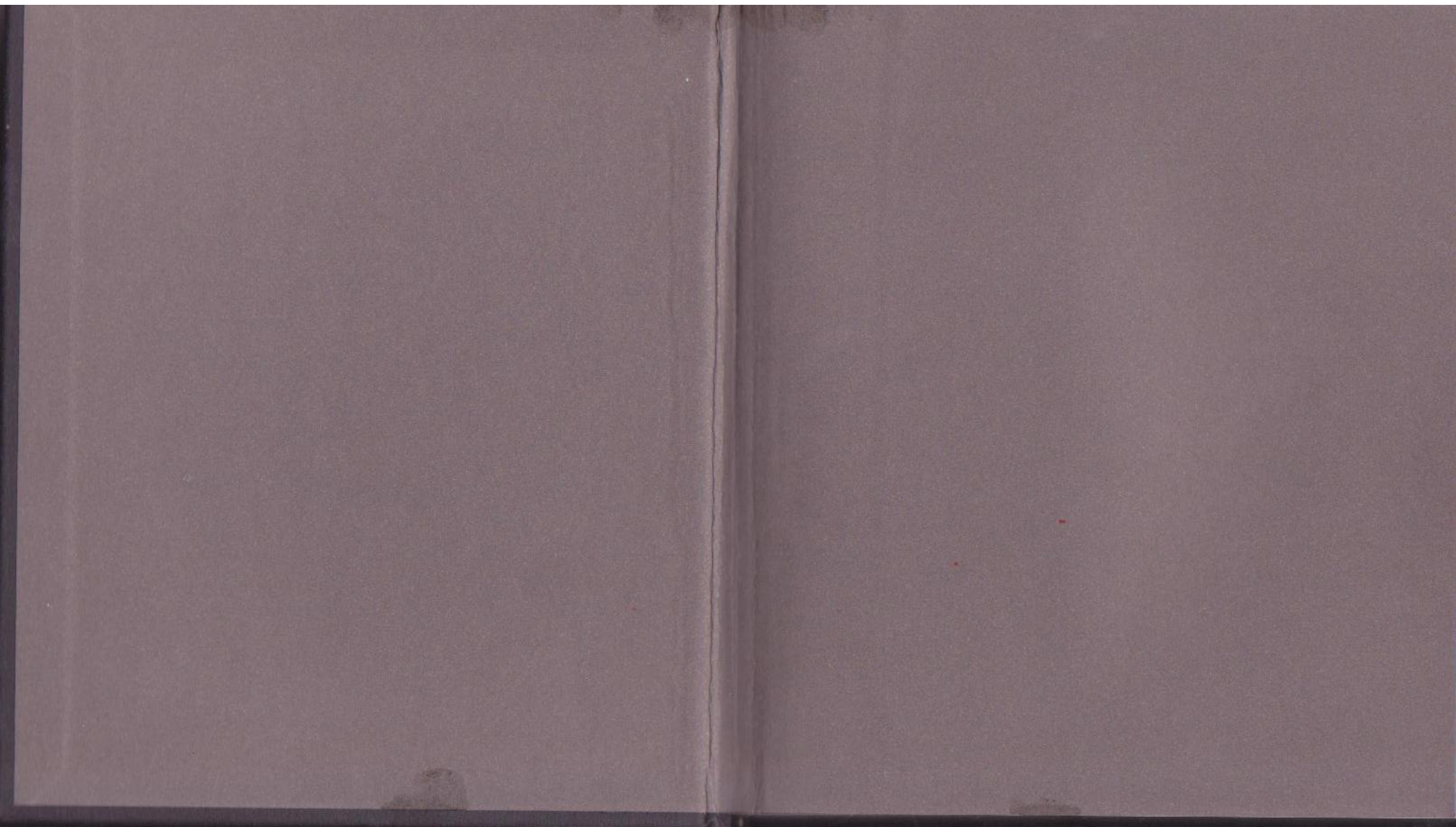


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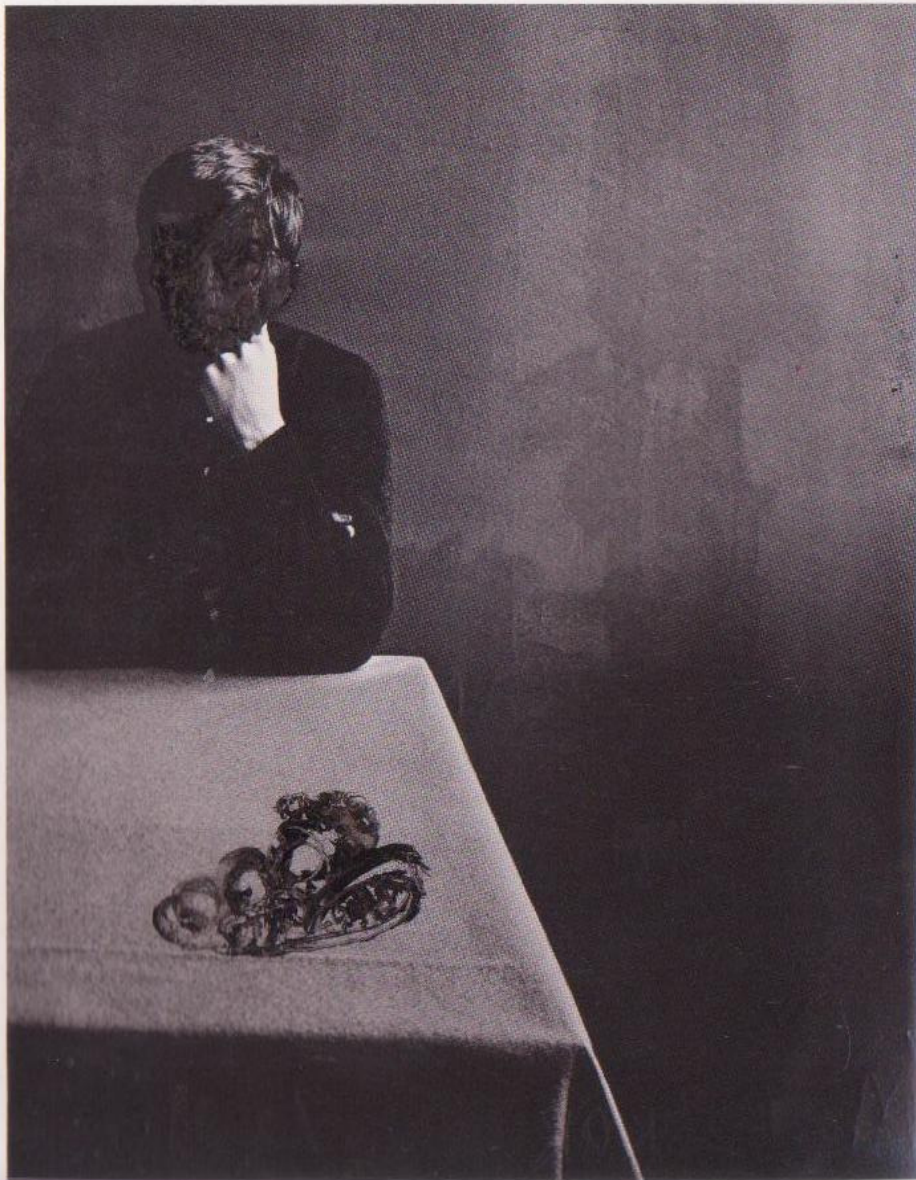
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If imitation is the highest form of flattery, Guy Bourdin is probably the most venerated commercial photographer of the past forty years. Known primarily for his fashion pictorials in *Vogue Paris* during the 1970s and for his titillating advertisements for Charles Jourdan shoes, Bourdin developed an unmistakable signature style that continues to be emulated by present-day fashion photographers, as well as by artists and filmmakers. An obsessive formalist, Bourdin's images are characterized by his use of theatrical lighting, dramatically graphic composition and vivid colour. His sophisticated yet scandalous narrative tableaux entwined sex, violence and a uniquely dark sense of humour that challenged conventional approaches to arousing the desire of fashion magazine readers.

While it has been acknowledged in critical circles that Bourdin's maverick image-making has left an indelible mark on visual culture, the acknowledgement of his influence has remained relatively discrete. When compared with photographers such as Helmut Newton, Richard Avedon and William Klein, Bourdin never really became a household name. His relative obscurity was not an accident. During his lifetime, Bourdin refused to exhibit or sell his fashion photographs as autonomous prints. He turned down offers to publish monographic studies of his work; the only 'book' he ever made was a lingerie catalogue for Bloomingdale's department store in 1976. At the height of his career, Bourdin's work was exclusively visible on the pages of fashion magazines, an intrinsically perishable medium. Bourdin embraced the way his images were consumed and then discarded on a monthly basis. This transient frame perfectly corresponded to the enigmatic public persona he projected. Despite being considered an auteur by fashion insiders and photography connoisseurs, Bourdin — who never accepted interviews, nor consented to having his photograph on the *Vogue* credit page — was renowned for being a solitary figure. As one of his collaborators at *Vogue* remarked, 'Guy wanted to remove every trace of his life.'

Bourdin's later pictures, such as in a pictorial from *Vogue Paris* (March 1974, pages 72–73) showing a nearly vacant landscape of a muddy pond, with a mysterious single figure in the foreground.

In a second example (page 23), Bourdin fixates his scrutinizing lens on an austere beach landscape – probably in Normandy where his family had a house by the sea. The naked body of a young girl is pictured lying on a bed of rocks against a backdrop of the dramatically vertical cliffs. Under the obvious influence of the American photographer Edward Weston, this crisp image divulges Bourdin's tentative interest in contrasting geometry, texture and colour, while still maintaining a haunting, suspenseful mood. As Philippe Garner noted in an essay on Bourdin's formative years, 'Bourdin always rejected the veridical and didactic aspects of photography in favour of an exploration of the medium's capacity for the transcendental. And in the practice of American photographers, and notably of Weston, Bourdin recognized the concern with formal perfection and extremely high finish that he knew instinctively must be his own objective.'

Parallel to these more sober formal studies, Bourdin also dabbled in street photography. Roaming open-air markets and working-class neighbourhoods, his camera captured numerous vignettes of everyday Parisian life. An image showing two older men sitting at a small bistro table, talking intensely over a dark, intriguingly photocopied object (page 17) typifies this vein of experimentation during this period. Bourdin was simultaneously attracted to the mundane, fleeting instant as well as the out-of-the-ordinary or unsettling detail. In these images, he intuitively synthesized two distinct schools of French street photography: Brassai's candid documentary reportage of Parisian café culture and the proto-surrealism of Eugene Atget's eerie, empty cityscapes. While he exhibited a number of his street scene prints under the

pseudonym of Edwin Hallan at the Galerie Huit in 1953, Bourdin's devotion to this genre was relatively short lived.

Instead, it was Surrealism proper that would win out as the primary conceptual influence over Bourdin during the formative years. Even after the war, the movement's allure was so strong that it propelled Bourdin to seek the artistic tutelage of Man Ray. After knocking on the studio door of his idol on numerous occasions, only to be turned away by the artist's wife Juliet, Bourdin was finally permitted to enter Man Ray's studio and, later, his confidence. As a veteran of several avant-garde movements including Dada and Surrealism, Man Ray provided a perfect example for the development of Bourdin's own unorthodox conception of art making. Man Ray married the modernist attitude with both narrative implication and psychic intensity. He was an active participant in avant-garde circles while simultaneously working as a commercial fashion photographer in the 1920s and 1930s.

Disregarding traditional hierarchies between disciplines, Man Ray above all provided a model of total artistic freedom – evidenced by Bourdin's photograph of Man Ray's atelier (page 25) taken during their brief yet influential friendship. The shot shows 'utilitarian objects' such as the small table *Lampshade* (1921), his famous *Chess Set* (1942) and the folding screen entitled *Les Vingt jours d'apais de Juliet* (1952) comfortably coexisting with more 'high art' paintings and sculptures. It seems that Bourdin wanted to project a similar image of artistic liberty in a self-portrait made in his studio from about the same time he was visiting Man Ray (page 27). With a piercing gaze, the young artist stares at the camera; his shadow rests on a table that is scattered with found objects such as a fragmented doll's head and arm (evidence of his admiration for the Surrealist Hans Bellmer's *Poupées*), two of his distinctive line drawings depicting menacing cats and other 'artistic' paraphernalia. More than

just a simple self-portrait, Bourdin portrays himself as an intense, solitary man – a persona that he would cultivate as the years progressed.

After several exhibitions in Parisian galleries – including a show of his photographs at Galerie 9 that featured a showstopper by none other than Man Ray – Bourdin sought to present himself to the editor-in-chief of *Vogue Paris*, Edouard Charles Roux. In 1954, the year of this decisive meeting, fashion photography was (and, idealized and conventional); it mirrored the guarded optimism and blossoming consumerism of the bourgeois class during the reconstruction period in France. When Bourdin met Roux, his portfolio was devoid of commercial work, though his previously unpublished black-and-white nudes (in particular, Weston's spine-baring close-up of women's buttocks, page 29) were convincing enough to win him a first fashion assignment for the magazine in January 1955.

Chapeaux-Choc (Hat Shocker) was the title of Bourdin's first pictorial, and as the title suggests, nothing less than a 'mini-scandale' ensued. Bourdin posed his models in the grimy meat market of Paris's Les Halles, surrounded by creations of milliner Claude Saint-Cyr, juxtaposed with dead cows' heads, eviscerated rabbits and freshly slaughtered meat hanging from menacing looking meat hooks (pages 30–31). The elegantly coiffed women smile back at Bourdin's lens with the usual complacency, unaware of the abrasiveness of the backdrop. This was far from the standard *Vogue* fare.

Despite the handful of cancelled subscriptions in response to Bourdin's shock treatment, not only inaugurated Bourdin's three-decade long relationship with *Vogue*, it also marked a radical shift in the conventions of fashion photography. As curators Susan Kismaric and Eva Repini suggested in their MoMA

exhibition catalogue *Fashioning Fiction* (2004), the first *Vogue* assignments of Guy Bourdin and William Klein in the mid-1950s marked the beginning of 'the new anti-establishment' in fashion photography. '[These photographers] were changing the relationship between consumers of fashion and the images themselves. In the same way they were changing the relationship between fashion photography and fashion photographers changed the models from objects to active participants in realistic situations, they began to make the viewer an extension of these situations.'

In his subsequent assignments for *Vogue*, Bourdin injected stylized snippets of realism into each frame, whether drawn upon his previous practice of street photography by posing a model wearing a fur wrap against an abstracted urban backdrop (*Vogue*, August 1955; page 53) or shooting a model wearing an elaborate floral Dior hat with flies and bees swarming on her face and neck (*Vogue*, 1959; page 37). Bourdin consistently invented different means to disrupt the vapid showcasing of clothing, make-up and accessories. Even in this very early period of his career, Bourdin understood that the cultivation of desire in fashion photography did not come from the simple description of the featured product. As these early pictures demonstrate, the reader's yearning could be piqued much more effectively by submerging a given product into a seductive *mise en scène* or an evocative ambience. Bourdin instantly became a master of subliminal advertising.

Francine Crescent started working as a buyer at *Vogue Paris* in 1957. As her importance at the magazine grew, so did her ferocious support of Guy Bourdin. Following their first editorial collaboration in 1956, Bourdin went from receiving sporadic assignments to being a regular monthly contributor. By the time Crescent was named editor-in-chief in 1967, every single issue of *Vogue* featured an average of twenty pages of Bourdin's pictures. She recalled their unprecedented collaboration

in a recent interview, 'When I became more important at *Vogue*, I gave him more work. I never refused one of his pictures, even when my director did not understand it very well.' In addition to her unflagging support at *Vogue*, Crescent was equally instrumental in introducing Bourdin to haute-couture shoe designer Roland Jourdan in 1964. Upon hiring Bourdin to create his first advertising campaign in 1967, Jourdan accorded the photographer total artistic freedom in a working relationship that was to last more than fifteen years. For a fashion photographer, such longevity is rare in a business riddled by extreme fickleness.

Aside from providing financial stability, an underground public exposure, both of these long-term relationships allowed an unrivaled platform for Bourdin's development and experimentation. Over the course of the 1960s, Bourdin gradually shied away from the overt shock tactics present in his first *Vogue* editorials and increasingly began to imbue his pictures with narrative. Glimpses of this developing interest began to surface as early as 1964. In a pictorial devoted to lingerie published in the June issue of *Vogue*, Bourdin photographed a model in a brassiere in front of a mirror (page 39). The model's body itself is out of focus and acts as a frame through which we view her clear reflection in the mirror. Explicitly cinematic in this image – which uncannily anticipates, by more than a decade, the pure imagery of Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* series of 1976 – Bourdin broke with established conventions of the model (and the product) directly facing the camera.

Towards the end of the 1960s, Bourdin realized that he could create voyeuristic tableaux, replete with B-movie intrigue and suspense through dramatic cropping and composition. These two devices became the staple of Bourdin's 'signature' period whose unofficial starting point could be attributed to the first advertisements made for Charles Jourdan shoes in 1968 (page 49). Bourdin shot this ad against the backdrop

of the Manhattan skyline, where the dramatic span of the Brooklyn Bridge formally organizes the shot, cutting the action into two parts (doubling the vertical rupture of the image by the magazine's gutter): a girl in a lime green dress and red shoes runs across the frame with a preposterous Charles Jourdan shoe under her arm; two policemen are pictured in the shadows of the bridge, attempting to apprehend the presumed thief. Ads such as this crystallized for the first time Bourdin's formal innovation, his saturated use of colour, his now submerged surrealism but, most of all, his unique capacity to condense a layered narrative into a single image.

'Bourdin was the first explicit model-theatrical photography,' according to Susan Kirsch and Eva Rieppel; 'his photographs – like the panels of traditional comic strips – where the action is compressed into the simple drawing of a series of highly dramatic moments.' Their observation alludes to one of the central preoccupations of Bourdin's enterprise. In all of his signature images, Bourdin entices the viewer to consume the stories he tells, rather than the products he displays.

As if his knack for visual storytelling were not enough, Bourdin's scenarios often lured the viewer with violence and illicit sex. In his most well-known images – such as a 1975 advertisement for Jourdan (page 81) depicting a chalk outline of a female victim's body and her pink high-heeled shoes lying on the blood-soaked pavement – Bourdin forces the viewer to occupy the position of voyeur. Many critics have read this recurrent subject position deliberately orchestrated by Bourdin's work as a prophetic reflection of how the entertainment industry later wanted to shape their audiences: as grateful consumers of sex and death. Francine Crescent echoed this assessment, saying in retrospect, 'Guy Bourdin's work is about life. He knew before everyone else that sex and violence were going to be very important factors in our society. But I think that he was interested in and wanted to describe, life itself.'

While this reading is entirely plausible, Bourdin's persistent use of the crime scene as a setting for his narratives might also have been motivated by a highly conceptual understanding of photography's history. His work seems to illustrate one of the central observations in Susan Sontag's seminal essay *On Photography* (1977), 'Photography is like evidence ... the camera record incriminates.' While Bourdin's criminal scenarios are entirely fictive, he conceptually engages with the evidentiary function of the photograph. In one of his most sophisticated images, the Spring 1978 Charles Jourdan print ad (page 96). A full-colour, double-page spread shows a model wearing strappy, high-heeled sandals, squatting on a concrete footbridge. She is holding a black-and-white photo towards the camera's lens, creating a direct view of her face and torso. The photograph-within-the-photograph serves a double role, simultaneously obscuring and revealing the model's identity. The picture's presence in the image provides proof of the photographic shoot's own artifice; it reveals the advertisement to be fiction. Bourdin used this *mise en abyme* device in several different shoots – most notably his infamous Bloomingdale's lingerie catalogue *Sighs and Whispers* from 1978 as well as in a second Charles Jourdan ad from 1978.

This highly self-reflexive, conceptual approach to the photographic medium is also evident in Bourdin's use of erotic images. Like his contemporary and unofficial rival Helmut Newton, Bourdin created images that mirrored the general loosening of moral codes and the acceptance of previously counter-cultural politics into mainstream society. Whether through direct depiction or through subtle inference, Bourdin's camera captured every possible sexual taboo – from lesbianism and sadomasochism to paedophilia and masturbation. Yet unlike Newton, Bourdin did not simply stage libertine sexual fantasies for the camera. He systematically combined the formal and structural devices intrinsic to the photographic medium with titillating sexual content. Specific fetishes often dominated his depiction of sex; these images were

choreographed so as to underscore the objectifying power of the camera's lens. This strategy is evident in some of Bourdin's most famous images, such as his Charles Jourdan ads for Spring 1978 (pages 102–103) and Autumn 1979 (page 107) as well as his 1980 Pentax Calendar images (pages 111–113). In each of these examples, Bourdin reduced the model to a fragmentary presence, echoing Hans Bellmer's surrealist doll sculptures. Only the fetishized body parts, such as a woman's legs under a antique desk or girl's bare ass peeking out from underneath a bed, appears in the frame. 'All these young photographers who paraphrase the philosopher Roland Barthes, "do not know that they are agents of death." In his influential treatise *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes meditated on the fetishizing power of the camera's lens. He understood that to capture the human figure on film is to produce 'that-has-been'; the image is proof that the photographed subject is mortal and will die. As if he anticipated Barthes's ruminations on mortality and the photographic image, Bourdin readily assumed his role as an 'agent of death.' On the darker end of the spectrum of his mature *oeuvre*, the depiction of sex and death almost always went hand in hand.

A 1975 advertisement for Jourdan epitomizes this thematic pairing (page 77). In the foreground of the scene, a woman is lying on a bed, her head is cropped out of the image and towers over up from the top of the frame. A small child peers through the bedroom's open door, while in the middle ground the television glows with an image of a screaming face, presumably from a horror film. Connecting the various clues, Bourdin portrays the woman's body simultaneously as sexual object and harbinger of death. Through dramatic inference, the timid child also plays a dual role – both as sexualized voyeur and witness to murder. Beyond their literal narratives, Bourdin's scenes entwining sex and death might also be seen as metaphorical reflection of his own practice. As Rosetta Brooks has suggested, 'Bourdin's pictures were "little deaths", interruptions of the image flow of consumer desire.'

To further dramatize these 'little deaths', Bourdin paid particular attention to the crafting of the sets and physical props for his photo shoots. Working in a vast atelier in a seventeenth-century Parisian mansion, he and his team designed claustrophobic decors that created an atmosphere of darkness. The windowless hotel rooms and bedrooms were among Bourdin's favourite spaces. The closed, nearly unfurnished rooms served as a setting for a highly dramatic suicide among hanging garlands (page 121) or the partially opened door of a hotel room revealing a dead woman in a transparent black bra (page 125) typified Bourdin's conception of the set as another formal and conceptual device in his practice.

Colour also played a central role in Bourdin's pictorial formula. As art critic Michel Guerrin has written, 'Bourdin ultimately revolutionized the use of colour in an era when the culture of black-and-white [photography] is still hegemonic in France. He is the first to set aside decorative preoccupations and to assign colours roles as agents of information, ingredients that give a sense of the image and the drama.' In particular, glossy red pigment recurs in Bourdin's late tableaux. Whether oozing from an electric socket – a surreal stand-in for a sexual orifice, as pictured in a Jourdan ad from 1975 (page 73) – or pouring forth from a model's mouth (pages 112–113), shiny red liquid is intended to be read as a stylized form of 'blood' as well as an obvious formal device, not unlike a splash of paint. In this way, Bourdin anticipates by more than a decade the work of such filmmakers as John Woo and Takeshi Kitano, who conflate highly stylized elements of graphic violence with 'utterly' gestures – saturating the frame with obviously fallacious representations of blood.

In the early years of the 1980s, Bourdin was presented with numerous challenges. His unparalleled artistic license at *Vogue* and *Charles Jourdan* progressively waned with the departure of his 'patrons'. In 1982, Roland Jourdan left the company to join

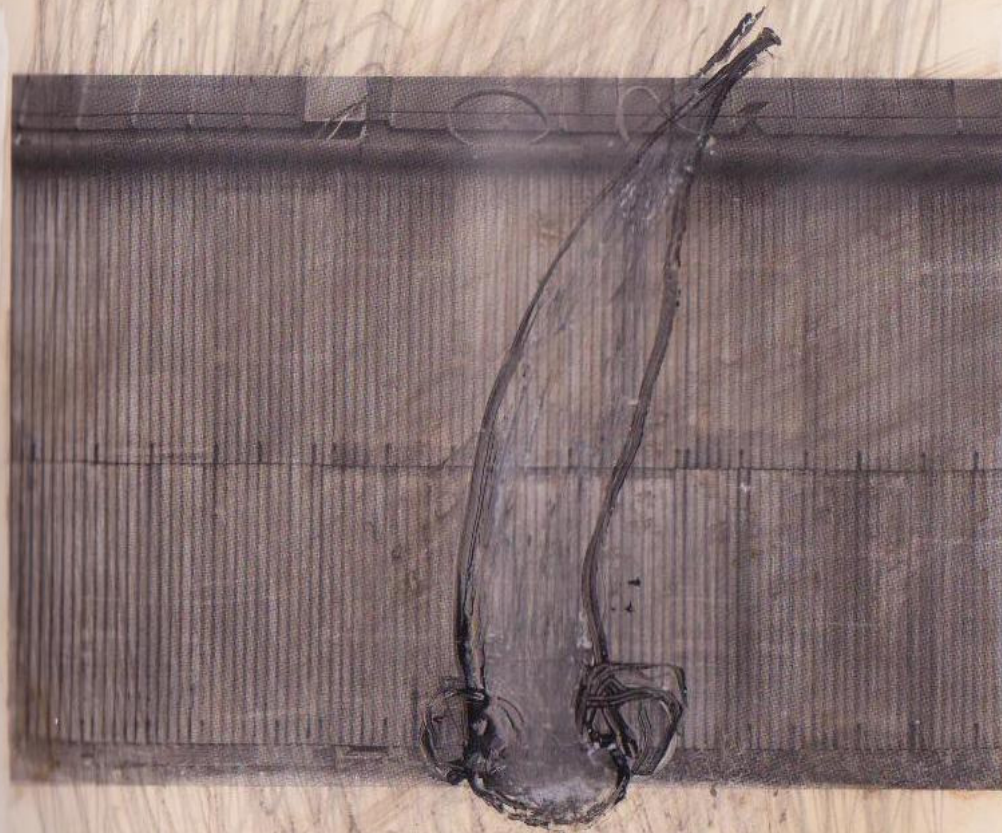
another shoe firm, Roland Pierre. Francine Crescent stepped down from her position as president of *Vogue Paris* in 1987, though she continued to work for rival fashion publishers, such as *Elle* and *Best*. While Jourdan, Crescent and Crescent continued to commission Bourdin in their new positions – producing a number of challenging images such as the 1987 advertisement for Roland Pierre depicting a racy Sapphic bathroom scene with a sink full of shoes (page 117) – his productivity progressively waned. The more restrained climate in the fashion industry and the advent of political correctness in the 1980s did not marry well with Bourdin's provocative aesthetics. Toward the end of the decade, Bourdin stopped working altogether and lived as a recluse in Paris. He died of cancer in 1991.

More than a decade since his passing, critical interest in Bourdin's work has been ignited once again. Numerous photographers have rediscovered his work through several posthumous publications and exhibitions. Their attempts to imitate Bourdin's unique style have often fallen short. It is tempting to explain this renewed interest in Bourdin's groundbreaking work with the changing tides of fashion. As gender politics have become as Manichean, past accusations of political incorrectness and misogyny have evaporated. Instead, Bourdin's formally innovative depictions of sex and violence have come to be perceived as a poetic reflection of contemporary culture. Beyond the ebb and flow of fashion, Bourdin's lasting contributions to the medium of photography might best be attributed to his consummate understanding of the formal and conceptual dimensions of his medium. His work seems to perfectly answer Susan Sontag's assessment of this powerful medium, taken from the conclusion of her essay *On Photography*: 'The possession of a camera is like being akin to lust. And like all credible forms of lust, it is insatiable. For the possibilities of photography are infinite; and secondly, since the camera is finally self-devouring.'

Unpublished, c.1953-7.



Unpublished, c.1953-7.



Unpublished, c.1953-7.



Unpublished, c.1953-7.



Interior of Man Ray's studio, Paris, France (unpublished), c.1953-7.





Self-portrait in the artist's studio, c. 1953-7.



Unpublished, c. 1953–7.



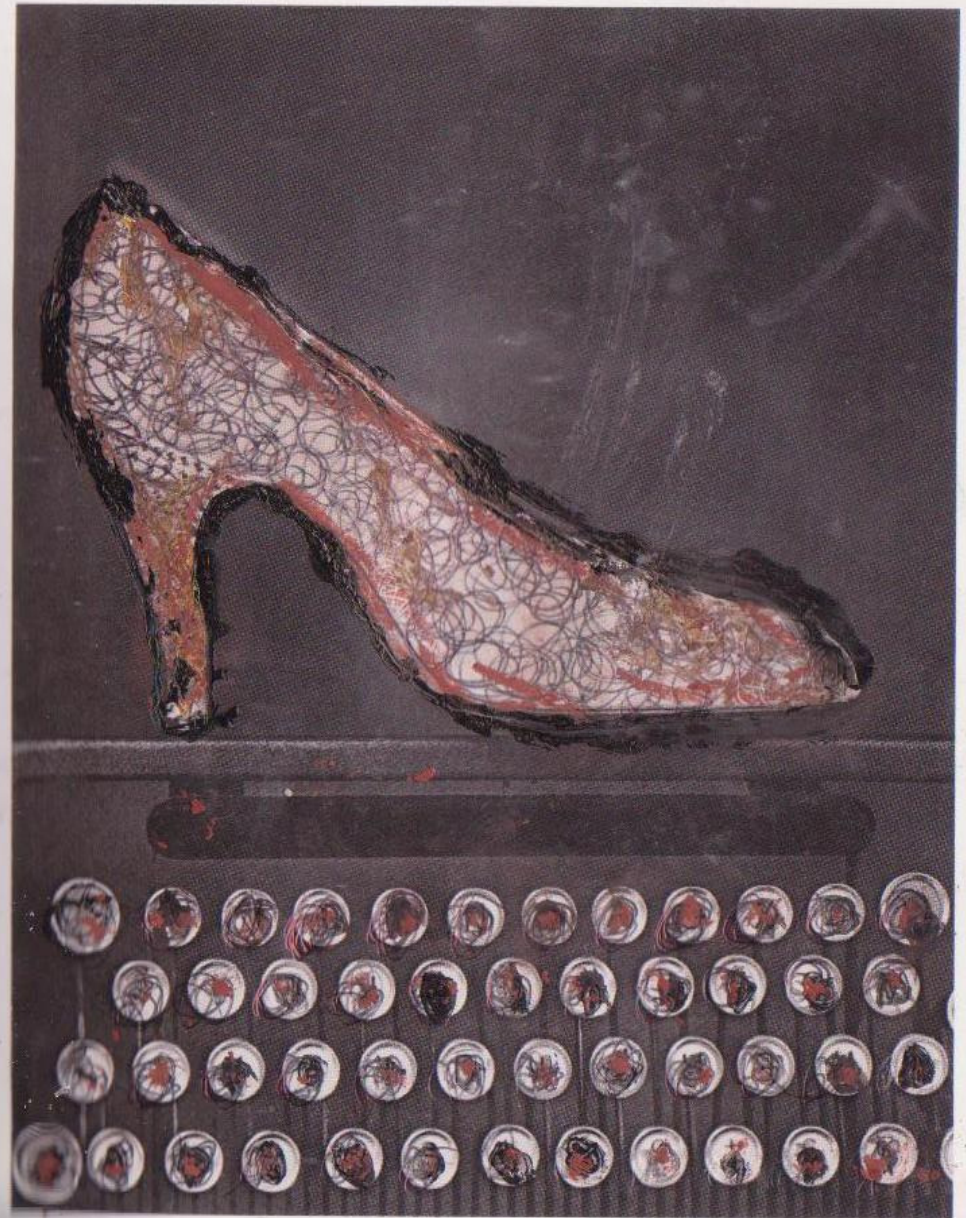


(previous page) *Chapeaux-Choc (Hat Shocker)*, *Vogue Paris*. Hat by Claude Saint-Cyr, February 1955.

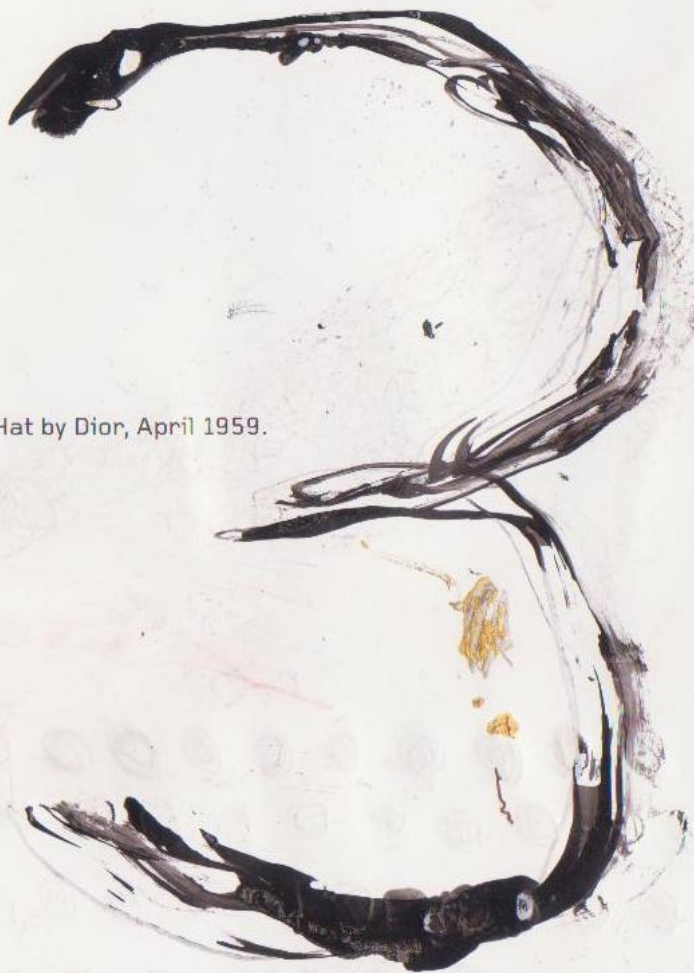
Vogue Paris, August 1955.



Vogue Paris February 1956.



Vogue Paris, Hat by Dior, April 1959.





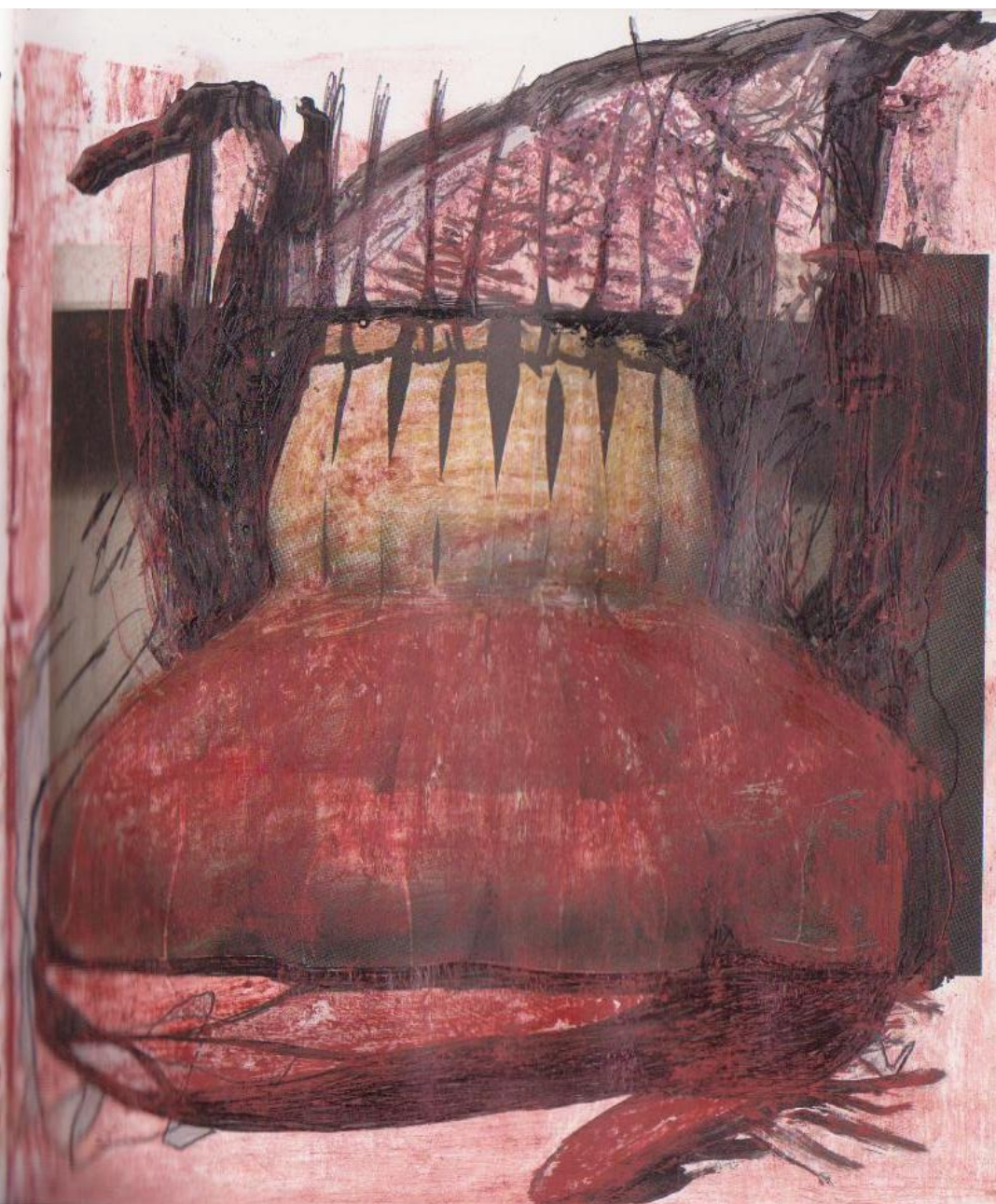
Vogue Paris, June 1964.

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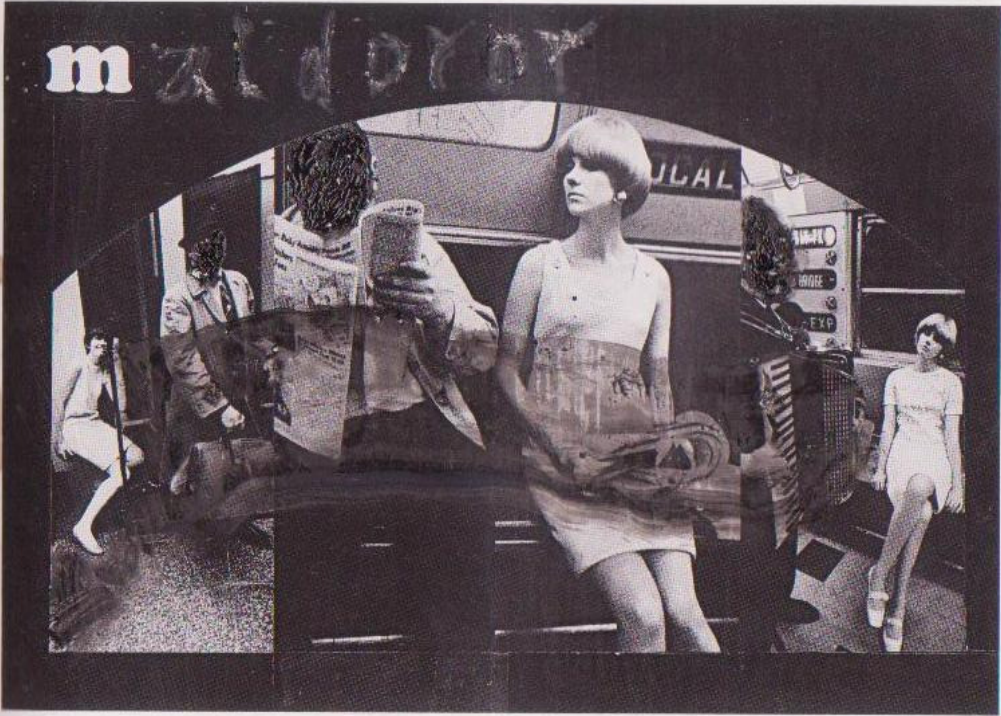


Unpublished, mid-1940s.

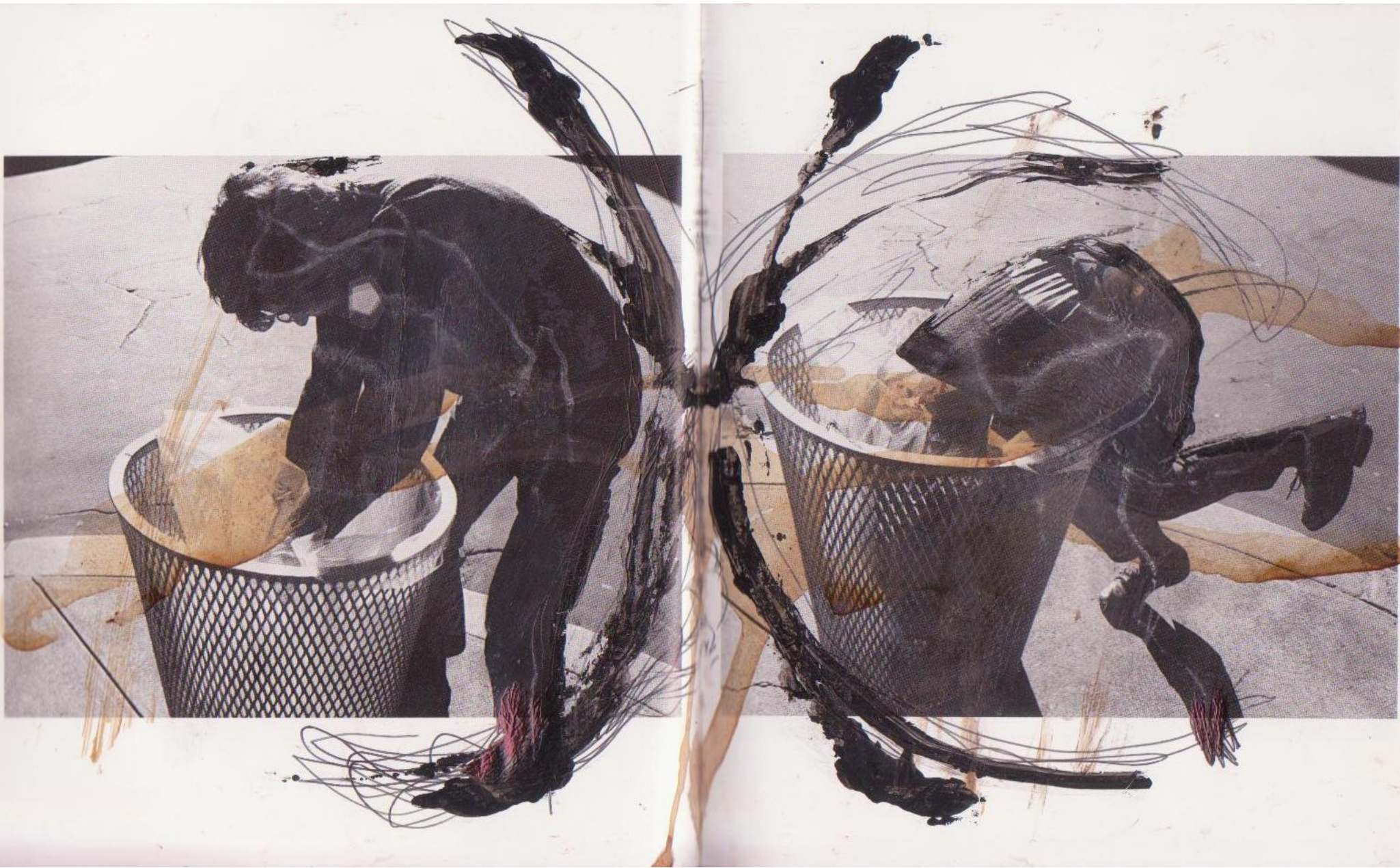




Vogue Paris, July 1966

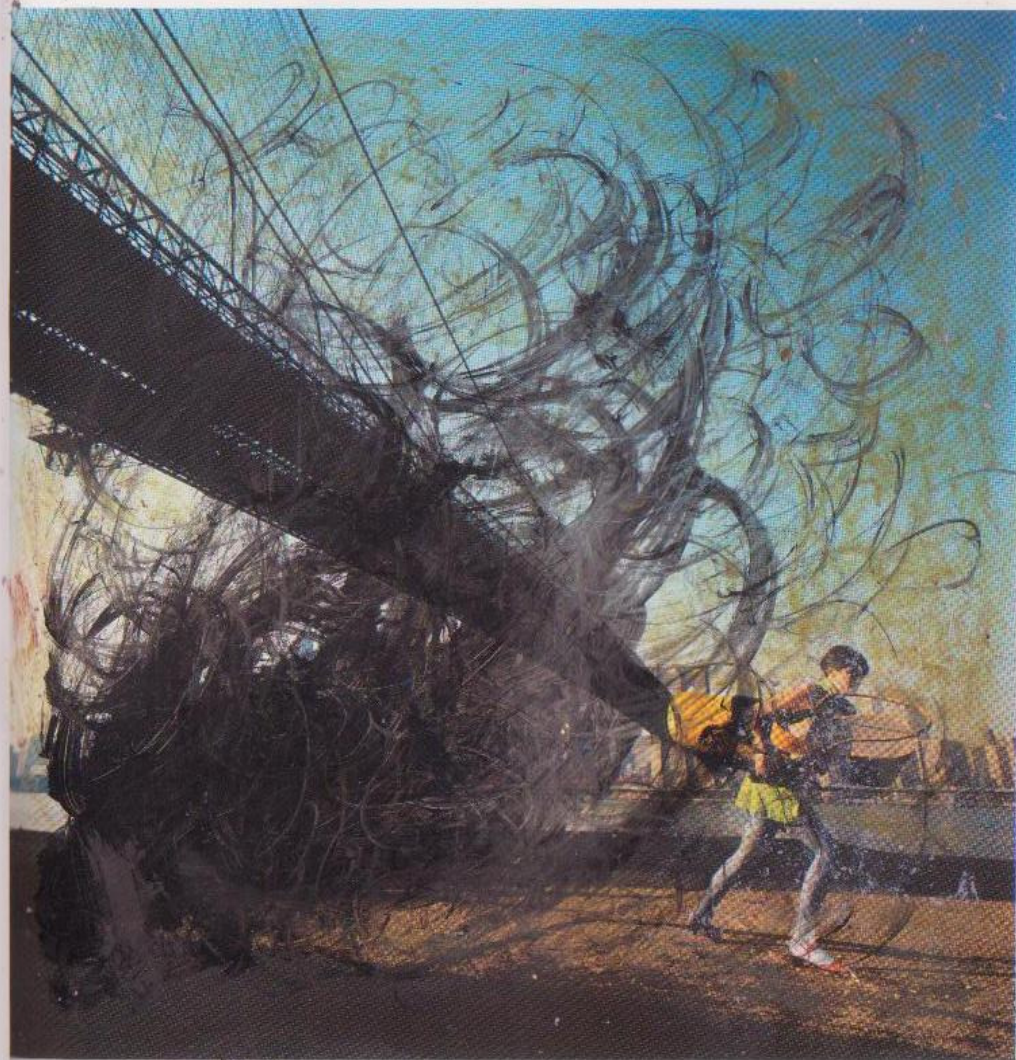


and so forth



(previous page) Güy Bourdin, New York (unpublished), 1967/8.

Charles Jourdan advertisement, Spring 1968.



Charles Jourdan advertisement





Vogue Paris, by Triumph, April 1969

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Vogue Paris, September 1969.



Vogue Paris, December 1969.



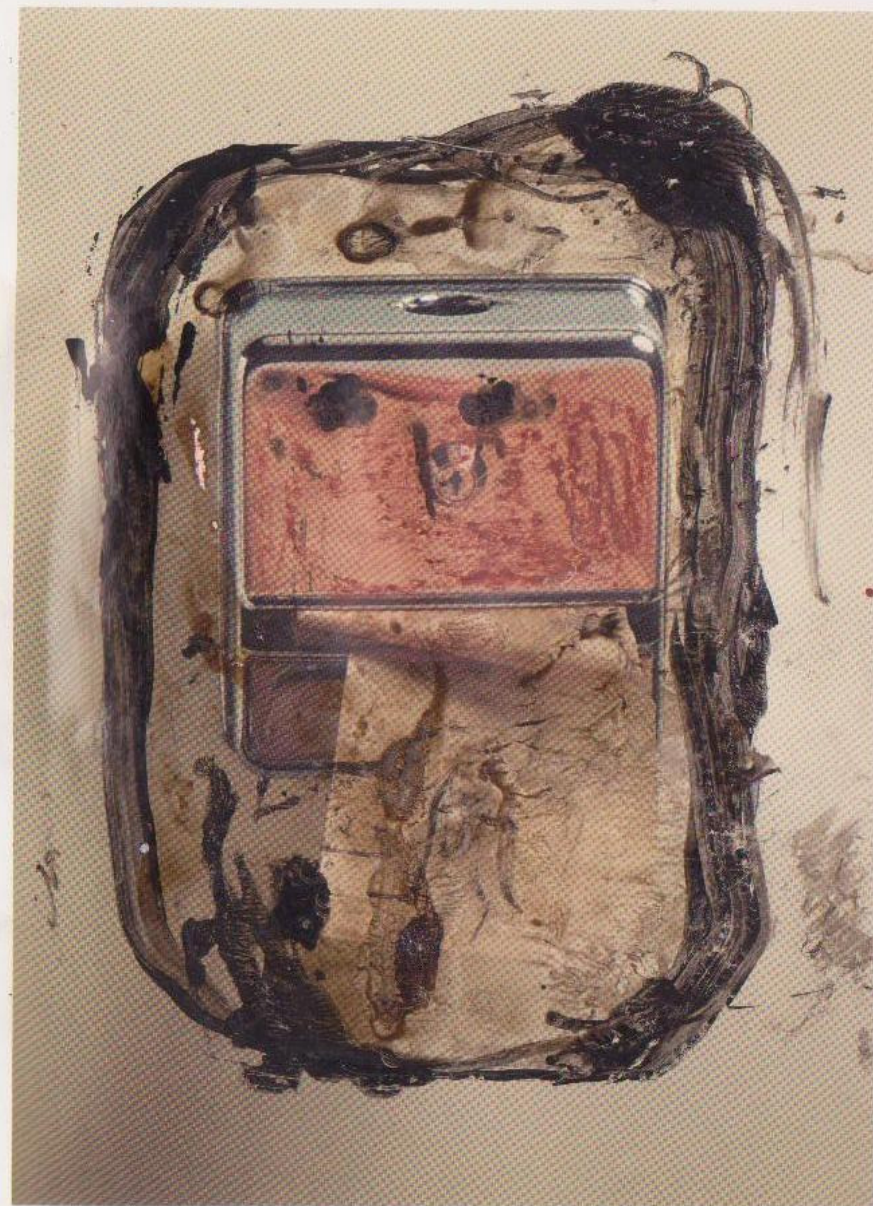
Unpublished, c.1970s.



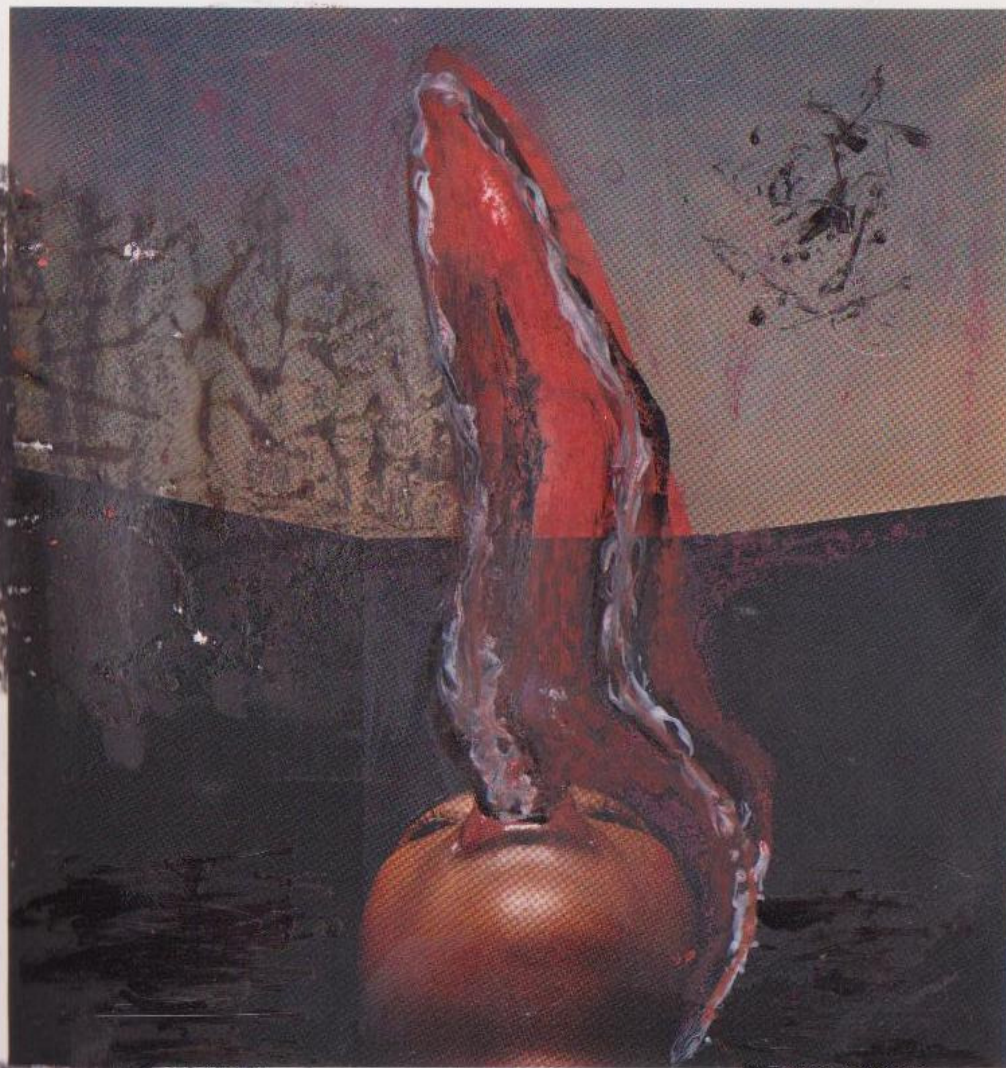
Papier Toilette, Kodak Photo Expo, 1972.



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Vogue Paris, Cosmetics by Dior, March 1972

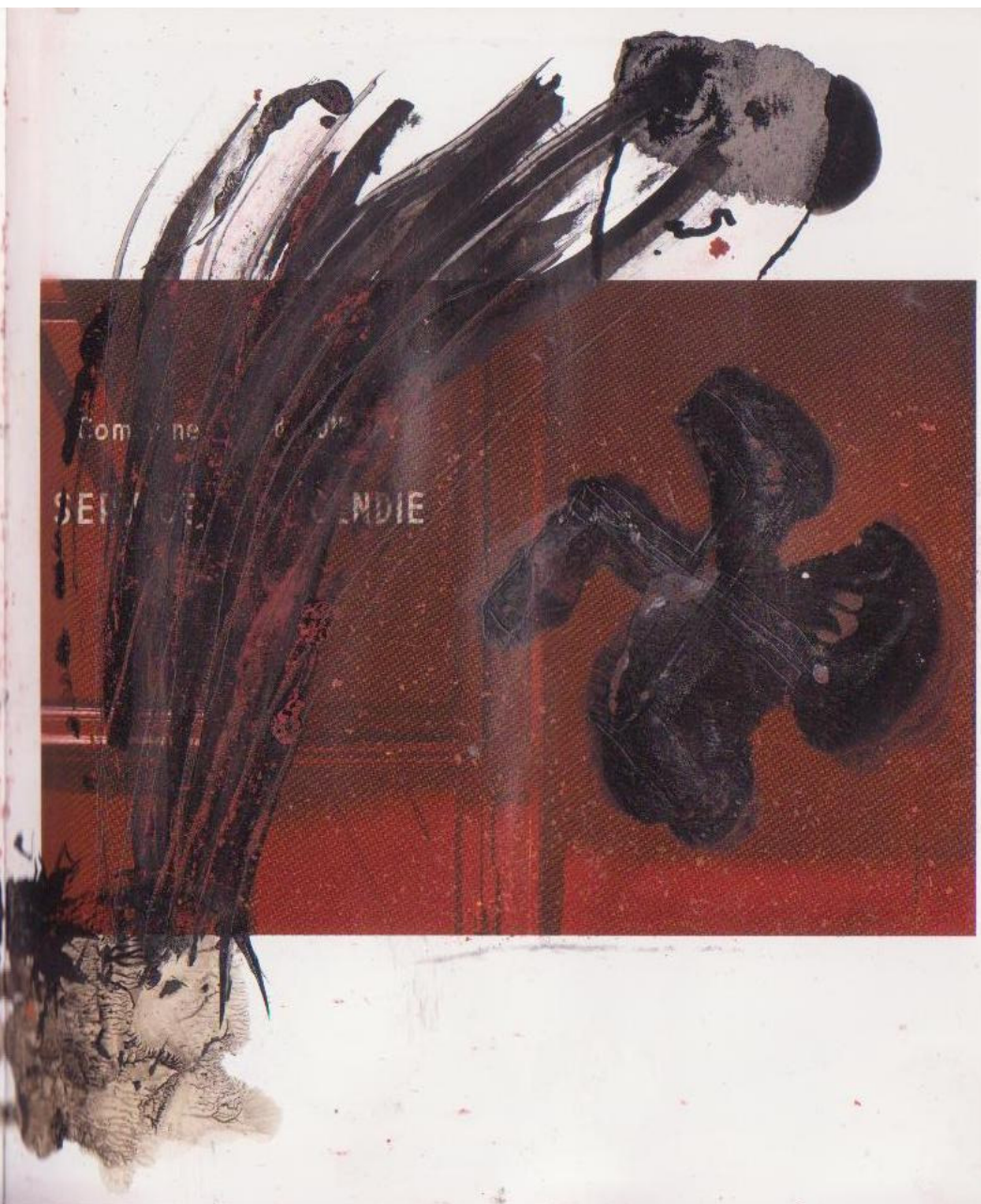




Charles Jourdan advertisement, Spring

58.69







(previous page) *Vogue Paris*, March 1974.

Charles Jourdan advertisement, 1975





Charles Jourdan advertisement, Spring 1979



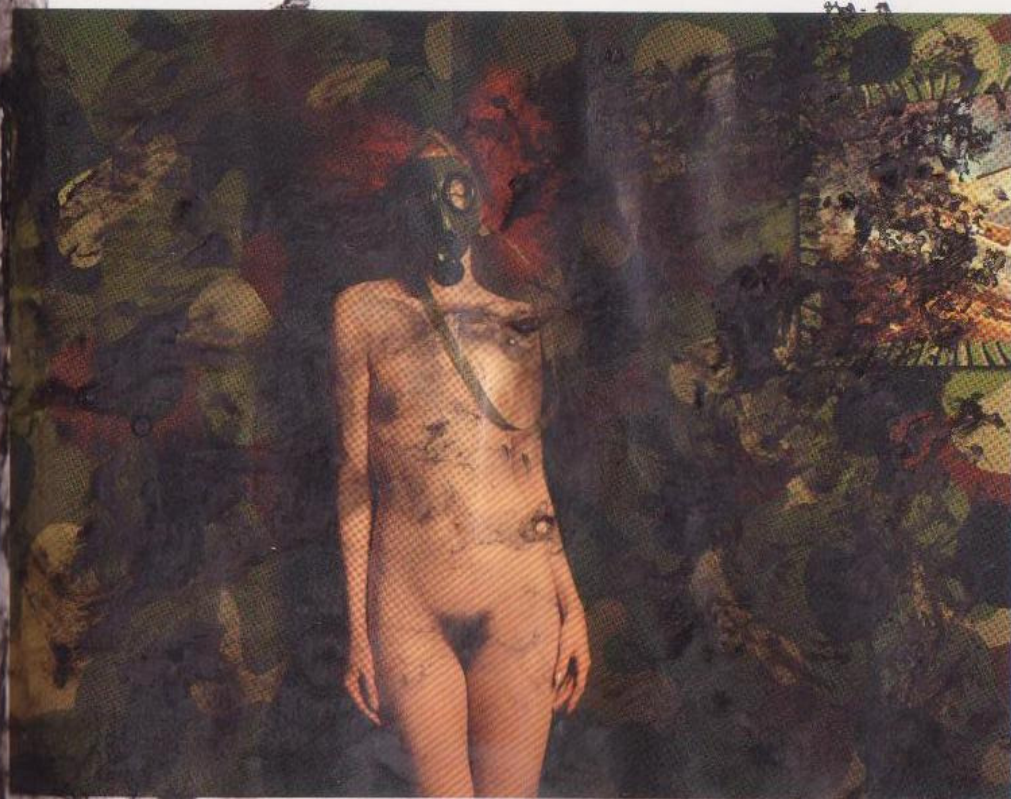
Charles Jourdan advertisement, Spring 1975.



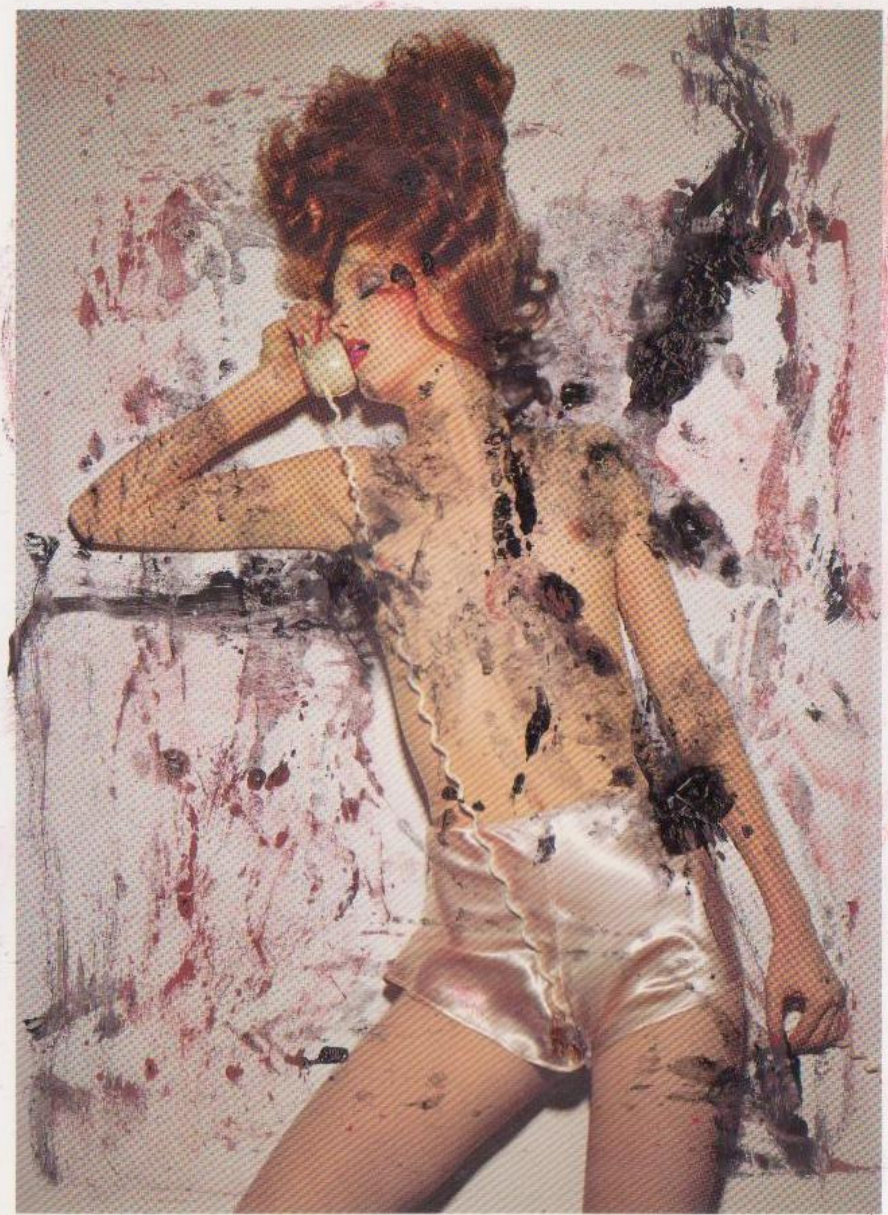
Charles Jourdan advertisement, Spring 1975.



Unpublished, Spring 1975.



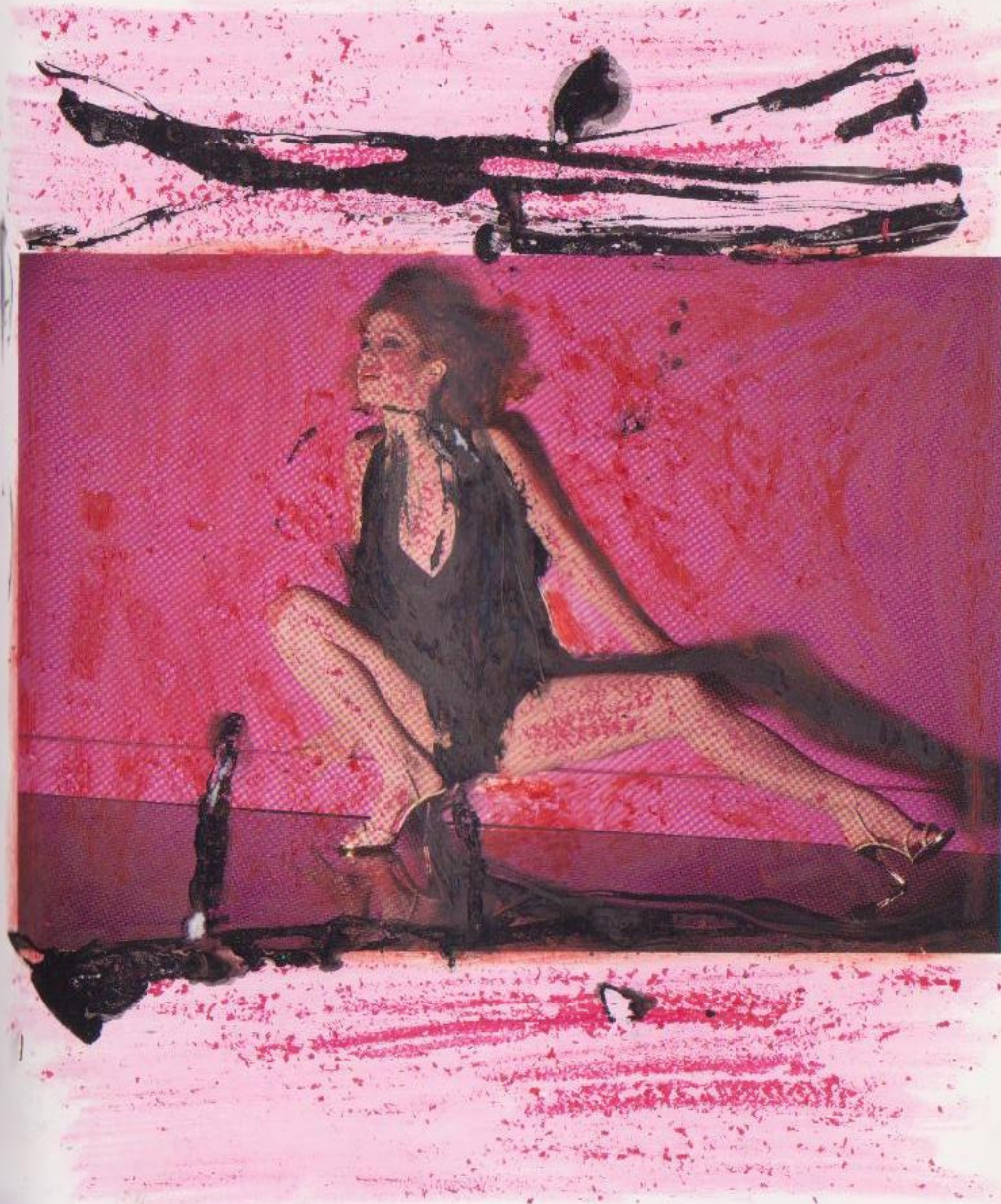
Vogue Paris, Lingerie by Les Noms



Vogue Paris, Winter 1976/7



Vogue Paris, May 1977.





(previous page) *Vogue Paris*, May 1977.

Vogue Hommes, Suits by Ted Lapidus, June/July 1977.



Charles Jourdan, *Leveillé*, 1977



20 Ans, c. 1977.

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Charles Jourdan advertisement, Spring 1978.

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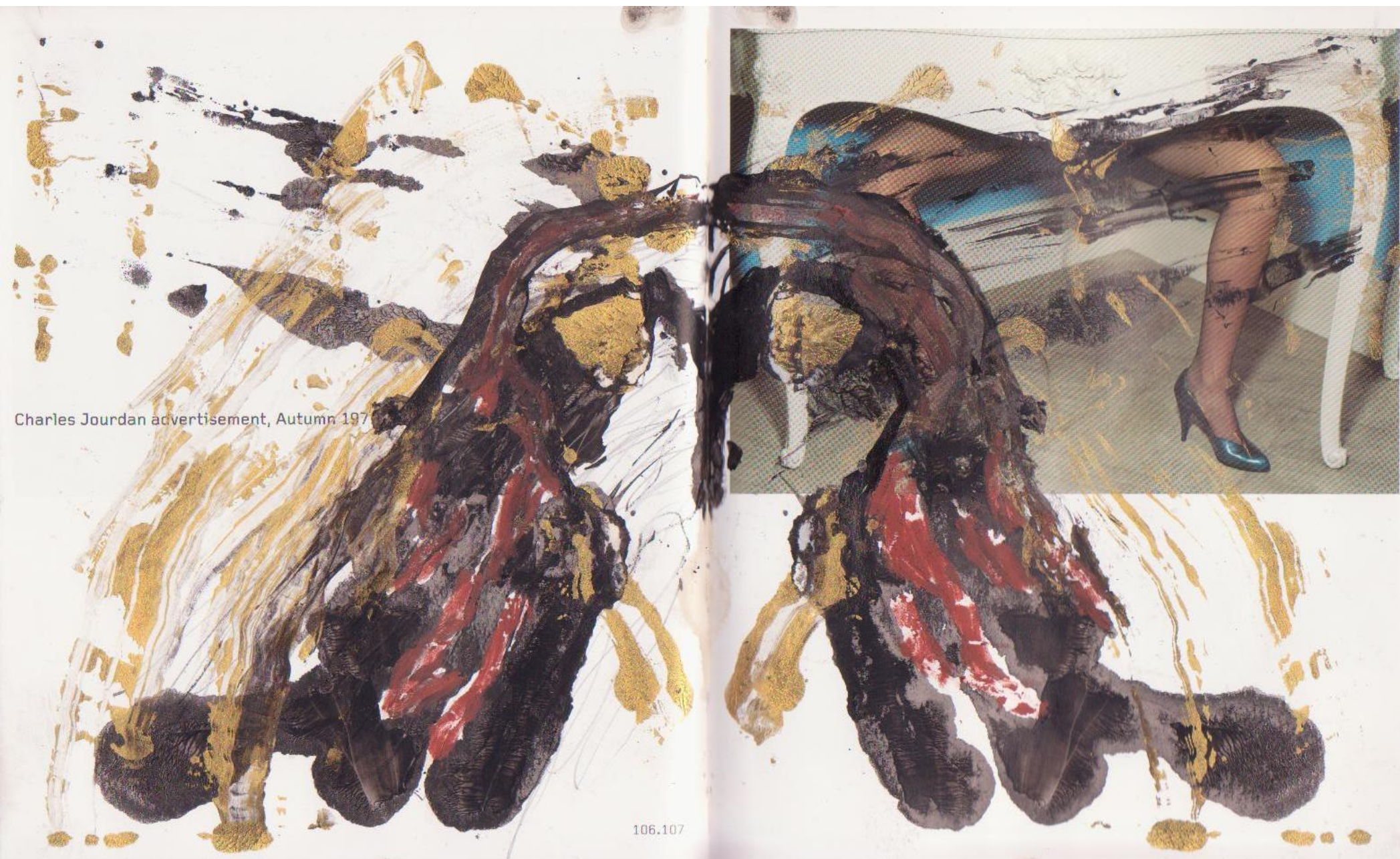




(previous page) Charles Jourdan advertisement, Spring 1979.

Unpublished, September 1979.



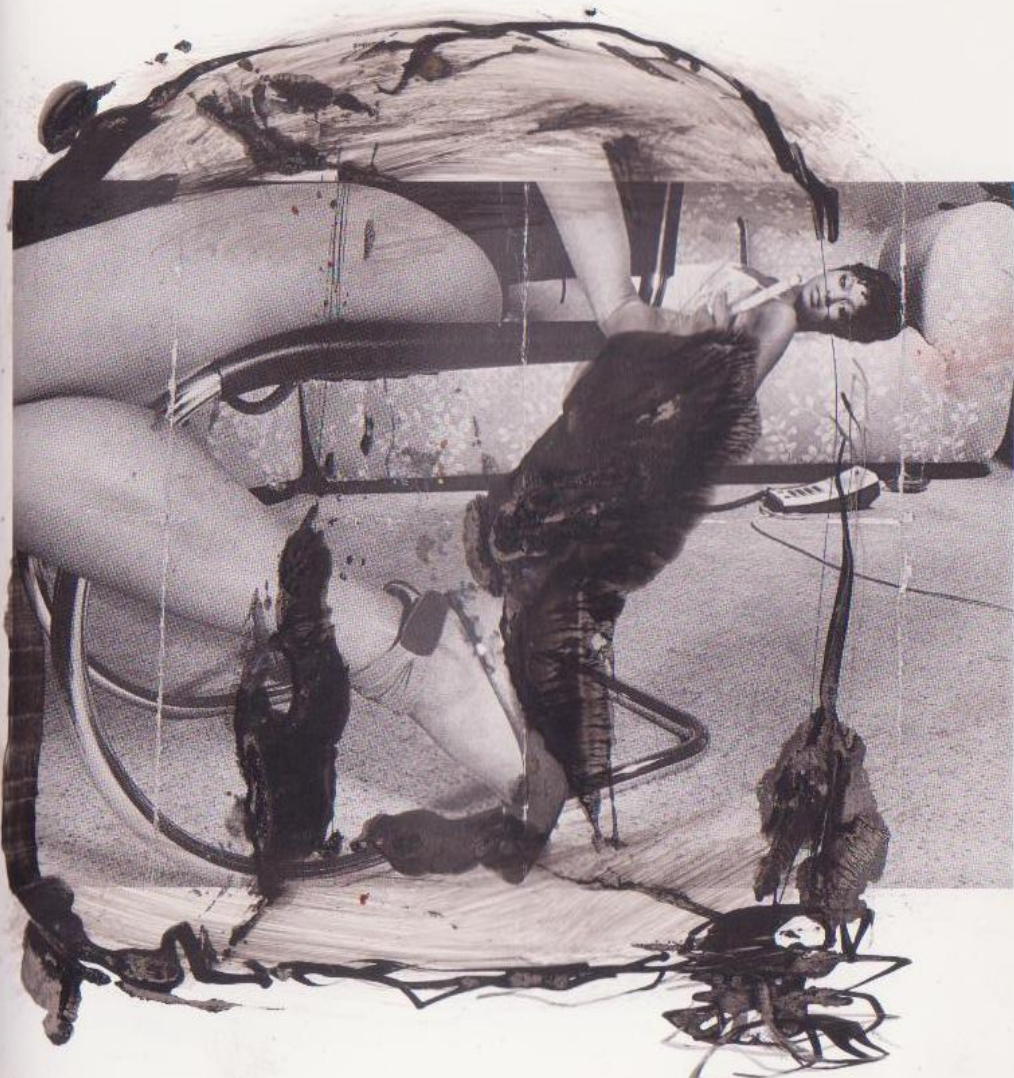


Charles Jourdan advertisement, Autumn 1976

Unpublished c.1980s.



108.109



Pentax Calendar, 1980.



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(previous page) Pentax Calendar, 1980.

Roland Pierre



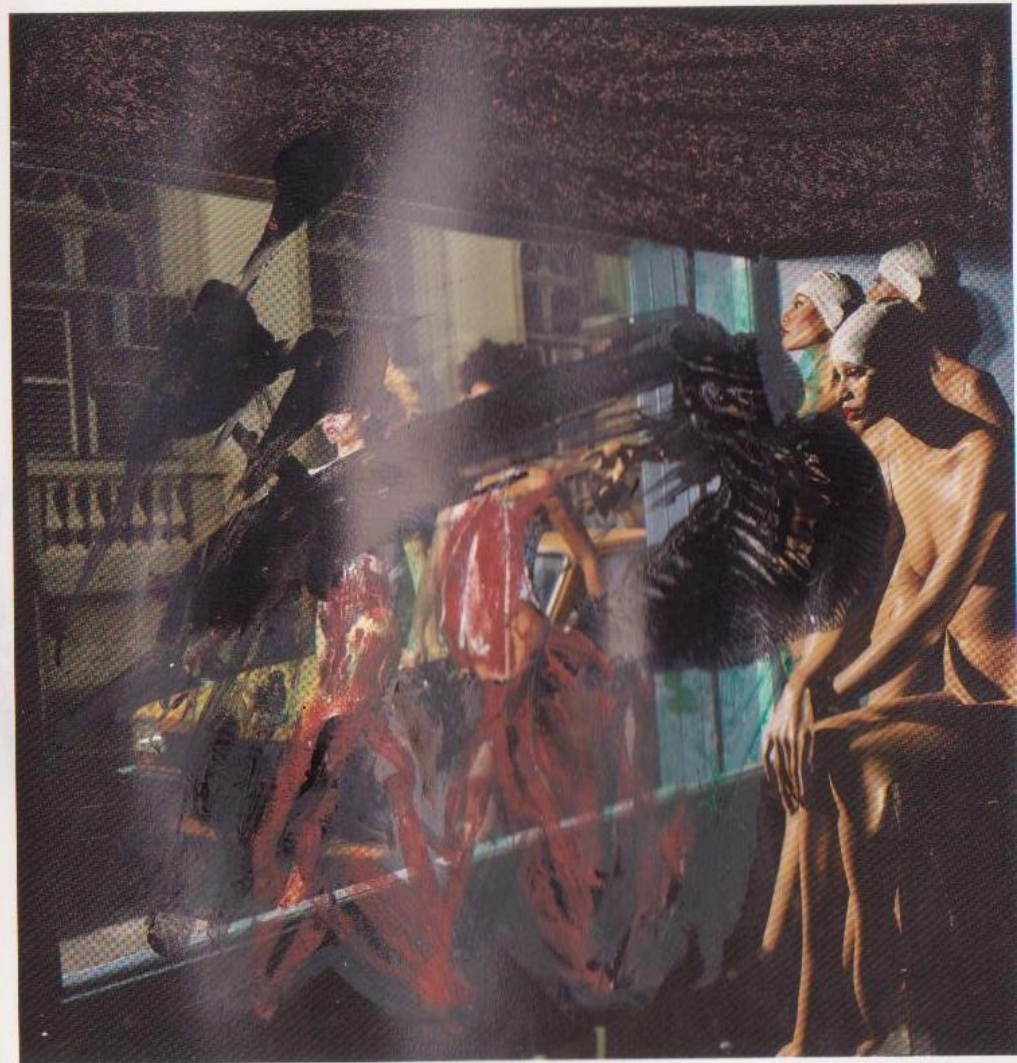
Roland Pigeon advised that the artist had

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Unpublished Data

1928 Born 2 December (né Guy Louis Banarès) in Paris.

1929 Adopted by Maurice Désiré Bourdin, who raises Guy with the help of his mother, Marguerite Legay.

1948–49 Fulfills his military service in Dakar, Senegal where he receives his first photographic training as an Air Force apprentice.

1950 Returns to Paris where he has his first exhibition of paintings and drawings in a gallery on the Rue de Bourgogne.

1951 Introduces himself to Man Ray and becomes his protégé.

1952 Has first photographic exhibition at Galerie 10, Paris. Man Ray writes the catalogue introduction.

1953 Exhibits photographs under a pseudonym at the Galerie Huit, Paris.

1954 First modelling with Edmond Charles Roux, editor-in-chief of *Vogue Paris*.

1955 Publishes first fashion photographs in the February issue of *Vogue Paris*.

1957 Covers the spring fashion shows as press photographer for American *Vogue*. Work shown in the Venice International Photography Biennale.

1961 Makes 'Solange Marie' (see page 14) for a group exhibition entitled 'Le Photomont' on the eve of the opening of the Salon National de la Photographie at Paris.

1962 Introduced to Roland Barthes, the literary theorist who will become his patron by Jean-Louis Baudouin, editor of *Le Canard Enchaîné*, Paris.

1964 First advertising campaign for Charles Jourdan shoes. Begins a five-year stint working for *Harper's Bazaar* (US). Birth of his first son, Samuel.

1971 Death of his wife, Solange Marie-Louise Gèze.

1972 Begins a two-year period of making fashion editorials for *Vogue Italia*.

1973 Launches advertising campaign for MAFIA Paris, an advertising agency.

1974 Begins a two-year period of making fashion editorials for British *Vogue*.

1976 Commissioned to make Bloomingdale's lingerie catalogue. Launches advertising campaigns for companies such as Balia (for Gianfranco Ferré),

Complice and Callaghan (for Gianni Versace), Madame Grès and Loewe.

1977 Works for *Vogue Hommes* and *20 Ans*. Work is included in 'History of Fashion Photography', an important travelling exhibition shown at venues such as the George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, The Brooklyn Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

1978 Commissioned to make calendars for Issey Miyake and Yashica Cameras. Launches advertising campaign for Claude Montana.

1981 Executes last advertising campaign for Charles Jourdan shoes (contract terminated upon the departure of Barthes from the company). Works for the magazine *Unes* (Italian edition) and *Le Monde*.

1982 Launches advertising campaign for Gianfranco Ferré, Lançetti and Roland Pierre (where he continues to work with Roland Jourdan).

1985 Refuses the Griffe advertisement for 'Le Photomont' commissioned by Emmanuel Guizot to feature an advertisement for a perfume.

1987 Termination of his relationship with Barthes after the departure of editor Francine Cassant. Launches advertising campaign for the magazine *The Best*. Launches advertising campaign for Hermès and Montblatch watches.

1988 Becomes the Trinity Agency's first artistic director for Photography in New York, where he works with Barthes on the 'Le Photomont' exhibition in New York and Paris.

1991 Dies in Paris on 23 March at the age of 62, having been ill for some time.

1999 First posthumous exhibition, held at the MacGill Gallery in New York.

2001 Publication of *Exhibit A* edited by Samuel Bourdin and Fernando Delgado, the first major monograph dedicated to Guy Bourdin's oeuvre.

2003 First photographic museum exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, which travels to the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia and the Jeu de Paume, Paris in 2004.

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like to know.

or maybe
you didn't

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